

RELIGIOUS STUDIES: A TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The word “religion” probably derives from the Latin root *religio*: Meaning to bind together, to bind fast, or fasten up that, which might otherwise fall apart. It was used sparingly in antiquity in several forms but its meaning in contemporary critical usage derives from the Enlightenment. Hence, the word “religion” is a translation of the Latin *religio* and is related to another word *religio*, which carries the meaning of chaining, or fastening or holding back. Thus religion binds people together. An acceptable definition has been framed over the years but with one deficiency or the other. A survey of existing definition reveals many interpretations. The Encyclopedia of philosophy defines “religion as the belief in an ever living God that is, in a Divine mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding moral relations with mankind” (Martinean 1967).

Religion is the recognition that all things are manifestations of a power transcends our knowledge (Spencer 1964). “Religion is rather an attempt to experience the complete reality of goodness through every aspect of our being” (Bradley 1967).

“A man’s religion is the expression of his ultimate attitude to the universe, the summed- up meaning and purport of his consciousness of things.” (Caird 1967).

“Religion is ethics heightened, enkindled, lit up by feeling” (Arnold 1965) worthy that most of these definitions stress one aspect or another of religion to the exclusion of others. Thus, Martinean and Spencer represent religion as some sort of beliefs or other cognitive state. Bradley and Arnold express it as a kind of moral attitude and activity and while Taggart and Tickle (1965:9) sees it as a certain kind of feeling.

In a nutshell, Encyclopedia Britannica defines religions as “a particular system or a set of system in which doctrine, rituals, sentiments and other similar elements are inter connected” (Henry 1992:509). In its general and comprehensive connotation, however, the word religion depicts man’s relation to that which he regards as holy, whether the holy being is super natural or even personal to the individual concerned. To the vast majority of Nigerians, however the term religion is always associated with the existence of a deity who assumes different names or nomenclatures in different parts of the country and among different groups and communities (Balogun 1978:50).

For purpose of this paper, therefore religion is the system by which man recognizes the existence of a super human controller of the universe, the recognition God as an object of worship, love and obedience, which ultimately leads to practical piety and morality.

DEVELOPMENT

Development in this case does not only mean physical development that we can always see; but it also includes intellectual and emotional developments that only manifest themselves in the behavior and mental activities of the individuals.

Development literally, connotes an increase in organismic function. However, Hornby (1981), conceptualized, development as a gradual unfolding and advancement through progressive stage of growth to adulthood. It is also the emergence from rudimentary state, structure of system to a well growth one of vigor and action.

For the purpose for this paper, development refers to the development of human society and is sued synonymously with “progress”.

For his part Afigbo (1982), draws attention to a common misconception of development, which has come to have serious repercussions on the Nigerian and indeed, African education and society. Here is his every word:

There is the question of making our educational system not just a system for producing skilled manpower but, much more importantly a system for training our youths for citizenship. I emphasize this point here not only because of the alarming moral and social problems which face Nigeria today, but also because of the through-going materialistic lone of our development plans in which purpose of education is seen mainly in terms of manpower development.

National development therefore means development in relation to nationhood, therefore, in theory, represents the emergence of a nation from a primitive state through progressive advancement in sustained socio-politics economic growth and stability to improve standards of living for the citizenry.

MEANING OF ISLAM, ATTITUDE OF ISLAM AND CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS OF ISLAM

What is Islam?

Islam is the name of an ideology that has been taught by the prophets from the earliest known times.

Innumerable prophets have appeared from time to time in all parts of the world to teach this ideology to all sections of the human race, consistently with the conditions of their times, the circumstances of their existence and the stage of their mental and moral evolution. *“And there is not a people but a Warner has gone among them”* (xxxx 24).

“We sent messengers before thee of them and those we have mentioned to thee and of them have not mentioned to thee” (XL: 78).

Attitude of Islam

Islam is a comprehensive concept of life and not merely a religion describing the relations, between man and his creator. It becomes necessary therefore, to first of all, account for the attitude of Islam, with regards to the pursuits of the sciences and the arts. The religion sciences began, naturally enough, with the *Qur'an* which the Muslims received as the word of God, the Devine message addressed to the man. Its perusal and understanding necessitated the study of the linguistic, grammatical historical. And even the speculative sciences, among many others, which gradually developed into independent sciences of general utility, the recitation of the sacred text brought into being and developed the religious “music” of Islam.

The preservation of the *Qur'an* led to improvements in the Arabic script, not only from the point of view of precision, but also of beauty. With its punctuation and vocalization, the Arabic script is incontestably the most precise for the needs of any language in the world. Islam is the religion of the past, present and future, it is a pleasure to see other language speaking Muslims adopting the Arabic script to their language, which brings them nearer to the *Qur'an* and to their beloved prophet Mohammed (may the peace of Allah be upon him).

Characteristic of Islam

Islam is an all-embracing mode of life. Not only does it prescribe beliefs but also the rules of social behavior, moreover, it occupies itself with the nicer application and functioning its laws. Islam does not believe in the life of this world as an end in itself or in body without any relation to soul. On the contrary, it teaches belief in the hereafter its motto as enunciated by the *Qur'an* is “the best in this world as well as the best in the “Hereafter” it is thus that not only does it praise the good and condemn the evil, but also provides reward and sanctions both spiritual and materials. As far as its injunctions and prohibitions are concerned, Islam inculcates in the spirit, the fear of God, the last Day of Judgment after the resurrection and the punishment of the Hell fire. Not content with this, it takes all possible precautions in the realm of material sanctions in order to refrain from permitting himself acts of injustice and violation of the right of other.

The Role of Islamic Studies in National Development

The national goals of education aim principally at good personality development, social integration and a progressive society. A progressive society is one that makes a steady advance in the pursuit of her stated objectives. Social integrative education is one of the most important instruments for achieving the aims under consideration and the basic components of socio-integrative education also include as far as Religion and moral education is concerned.

The centre piece of the learning activities would be a four tier core curriculum, viz (i) Health education (including physical training), (ii) Integrated Sciences (including mathematics), (iii) Language, as well as, (iv) Religion and education and morals.

The curriculum focuses on the point that we should be concerned with the development of the whole person (Gurki 1975:22), not just the production of mechanical or robot doctors, teachers or engineer, experts lacking human feelings, human consideration and national consciousness.

In view of our present realities, the emphasis should be on proper personality / character development. In Nigeria, for example, all the parts curriculum should play a concerned role towards the evolution of not just the teachers, the engineer and so on, but the good man the good person: that is in the context of the Nigeria constitution, the National policy of Education and Religion.

Viewed from this angle and from the perspective of Nigeria's ethnical and social economic state, the significance of the concepts of socio-integrative education, with its integral curriculum, in which religious studies and morals becomes part of the core programmes, inter disciplinary approach and emphasis on the production of man of integrity and professional competence cannot be over emphasized.

In order to prevent indiscipline within our society, religious studies should be encouraged from primary level up to high level. If religious studies are given priority from primary level it would be part and parcel of the students, since, they are the leaders of tomorrow. Armed robbers strike always because of lack of human feelings as well Doctors and Nurses were not attended to their patients, Sole Administrators, Councilors, Chairmen, Commissioners, Governors Honorable, Senators, President, Special Assistant and Accountant were embezzled public fund, and cultism is rampant among the students, while teachers and lecturers were not committed to their duties, all these mentioned above are because of lacking of religious studies.

Furthermore, the indiscipline within the society include: erosion of respect to the constituted authority, diversion of public resources to private pockets, reduces the level of public morality and accountability, jealousy, selfishness and irresponsibility (Aminu, 2003).

Not only that discipline is a secret of the success of great men, our universe also stands on the same foundation. If the solar system is working regularly, if the stars are revolving around the same systematically and if there is no flaw function for millenniums. It is only due to the fact that the solar system is based on order.

Order is found in everything around us from the largest bodies of the universe to the minor test thing called "atom". Everything in this world is made up of tiny atoms. A wonderful discipline is in action and it is seen in each and every moment of the universe. There are tiny atoms in every system.

Every atom has its own centre, which is called "proton" many electrons move round the centre like stars and moons. In the words of a great Muslim scholar; "if you tear up the heart of every atom you will find its sun in its centre".

The universe is the best guide for all of us in Nigeria. We should learn about life and the causes and reasons of its stability and success from it. This universe tells that; the secret of my survival is the regularly and orderliness which my creator has ingrained in me.

In this World, there no religion that teaches or encourages hooliganism, cheating, killing, exploit, arrogance but be discipline and follow the rules and regulations laid down by the creator.

Teaching religious studies from primary to high level, it would inculcate good, behaviors on individual instead of behaving irrational and peace would reign in the society, in spite religions allows to know more about God then the teaches moral and ethics together.

Religious studies should made compulsory throughout the pre-university stage with a view inculcating in them religious outlook on life and sending them out in to the world with the stamp of religious culture on their mind. Therefore, to keep this conception of religion in view in determining the content and form of religious studies in our schools.

Before the students pass out of the school stage, some of them are likely to develop a taste for higher studies in religion, just as some others are likely to acquire a liking for other subjects. The Universities, therefore, most equally cater for their needs.

At the school stage, therefore, every students would have gone through the compulsory test arranged with a view to seeing that he has an intelligent grasp of the essentials of religion as world view and if rightly brought up, would have developed religious character but if the teaching of religious is reach the University to learn religious shall be adequately equipped for the conduct of life as true human beings.

If not religious instruction but through religious studies is aimed at by our schools, by the time our boys and girls reach the age of seventeen and be ready to leave the higher secondary school most of their habits would have been established: their character would have been formed; as adolescence is the period of conversion Even conversion of character would have taken place: their out on life would have largely taken the shape.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, certainly, it has been identified that one of the major problems affecting the country nowadays, is lack of indiscipline within our society. All efforts make by the individual to rescue the situation are in vain. For this barbaric situation to charge in the society, religious studies must be recommended and supported in playing its role. Religious studies could play a greater role in turning society and individual of the Nigeria. Since the religious studies lays much emphasize on equality, justice and orderliness which is the bedrock of every normal society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Religious societies which almost completely caged or disallowed will not augur well for the development of morally upright individuals and sanitized society.
- Enough time should be created for students and pupils to learn religious and moral studies.
- The contents of religious studies should be such that will promote the unity of the nation.
- The mass media which includes the different radio stations, newspapers and television stations should be used to broadcast religious knowledge programme which will teach morals and educate the Nigerian youth of the need to line decently since they are the leader f tomorrow.
- The leaders should be encouraged through religious knowledge, to have the fear of God and rule or give order with the fear of God. It is difficult to arrive in the discipline society where the leaders are indiscipline.

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